

A think piece



Pedagogic leadership

Creating cultures and practices for
outstanding vocational learning

Authors

Bill Lucas and Guy Claxton, Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester.

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Introduction

It is good to see vocational education coming centre stage in the education debate. The time is absolutely right – vocational courses are not just a ‘second chance’ default for those who have not done well in school-based academic studies. Aside from rhetoric around the ‘forgotten 50 per cent’ and the need to drive up skills in order to boost the economy, we are seeing new programmes, such as traineeships, new qualifications, such as tech levels, and new accountability measures, such as the technical baccalaureate, all with the declared intention of raising the profile and value of vocational programmes.

The attention is very welcome, but often the focus is somewhat misplaced. In much of what we hear, there is an assumption that our current system of vocational education has ‘failed’, and that the way to make it better is to make it more like its ‘academic’ counterpart. This message is heard on all sides of the political debate, with talk of centres of excellence and support for new types of institution, alongside policies aimed at bringing ‘rigour’ and ‘robustness’ through synoptic assessment and employer-endorsed qualifications.

We all accept that more can, and must, be done to ensure the highest possible quality in the vocational learning undertaken by millions in this country. But two misconceptions remain – the first is that ‘vocational’ learning is only really about trades such as bricklaying, motor vehicle, and hairdressing and the second is that complex pedagogy is the exclusive domain of the ‘academic’ world.

It is not difficult to understand that *all* of us need to undertake vocational learning as we prepare for working life – after all, it is vocational learning that teaches us the skill and the craft of how to do a job, and, in many ways, it is the more difficult part of learning. To put it simply, it is the skill that needs to balance with the knowledge. And the excellent *How To Teach Vocational Education*, published in 2012, set out for the first time the ways in which the pedagogy behind vocational learning is an immensely complex concept.

So impressive was that report that, early in 2013, the 157 Group of further education colleges and City & Guilds came together to commission its authors, Bill Lucas and Guy Claxton, to work with us to explore the implications for leaders in colleges who aspire to deliver outstanding vocational education for all their learners. Alongside their research, Bill and Guy organised a day-long seminar with key leaders from colleges, in the 157 Group and beyond, and important influencers and policymakers in the education world.



This publication is largely the result of that day, during which ideas were shared and debated, and the passion that college leaders brought to the arena was manifest. In this document, Bill and Guy have built upon their previous work and offer a message that chimes with previous work from the 157 Group and City & Guilds concerned with leadership and culture. It is an indication of the growing nature of our partnership that we feel this will add to our knowledge in a very rich way.

157 Group colleges are taking forward the complexities of vocational education with networks of research professionals and combining this with new approaches to teaching and learning. An example of this work is that City & Guilds has refreshed its TechBac®, where what is emerging is a new relationship between the acquisition of technical knowledge; how it is then taught and applied; and its relationship to the employer and the workplace. In all that we do, relevance to the workplace is critical, alongside the preparation for progression to higher levels of learning, such as higher education. Changing the perception of vocational education and its benefits is a 'hearts and minds' job inside and outside the sector.

So, importantly, this publication offers a very concrete set of actions for leaders in colleges who understand how complex vocational education is, how critical it is to the success of every learner and who wish to bring it centre stage in their organisational performance. We hope you find it as stimulating as we have done.

Peter Roberts
Chair
157 Group

Kirstie Donnelly MBE
Director Product Learning Technology Development
City & Guilds



Pedagogy and pedagogic leadership

“Credibility in the eyes of others is the key to pedagogic leadership status.”

Steffan Silcox and Neil MacNeill¹

As Peter Roberts and Kirstie Donnelly outlined on the previous page, there has recently been a much tighter focus on what is going on with regard to teaching and learning in the FE sector. This was particularly evident when the Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning (CAVTL)² chose to include mention of a most un-British topic – vocational pedagogy – in the final report of its inquiry.

Indeed, that we are talking about pedagogy at all is, in part, the result of the research we undertook for City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development³ and submitted to the CAVTL enquiry. In it we offered, possibly for the first time, a comprehensive overarching theory of vocational pedagogy. We argued that vocational pedagogy is essentially the outcomes of a series of decisions that teachers⁴ make when they select teaching and learning methods and that these decisions can only be made once you are clear about the goals of the vocational education that you are providing. Our ‘seven steps’ process is summarised on pages 8–11.

In this think piece we ask four questions, each one of which relates to the diagram on the opposite page (Figure 1):

1. What is the role of pedagogic leaders in creating a climate for outstanding learning?
2. What do leaders need to do to create a different set of relationships between students, teachers and employers?
3. What kind of processes do leaders need to use to facilitate a real collaborative enquiry by staff into the best methods of teaching and learning to use for all of their students?
4. In short, what are the changes in practice required if you are to be a great pedagogic leader?

1 Silcox, S. and MacNeill, N. (2006) *Pedagogic Leadership: the key to whole-school renewal*. Beechboro, WA: Department of Education and Training
 2 McLoughlin, F. (2013) *It's about work: excellent adult vocational educational teaching and learning*. London: CAVTL.
 3 Lucas, B., Spencer, E. and Claxton, G. (2012) *How to teach vocational education*. London: City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development.
 4 Throughout this paper we have used ‘teacher’ to describe all those who play a role in FE – lecturers, coaches, mentors, tutors etc.

Our assumption, as the quotation at the top of the page opposite suggests, is that pedagogic leaders need real knowledge, understanding and expertise in pedagogy to command respect from other members of staff. Indeed, as we will argue later, they need to visibly and audibly model their interest in and valuing of pedagogy. To answer any of the questions above we need to start by understanding the process that needs to be gone through to develop a vocational pedagogy.

Then and only then can we begin to answer our four questions about pedagogic leadership.

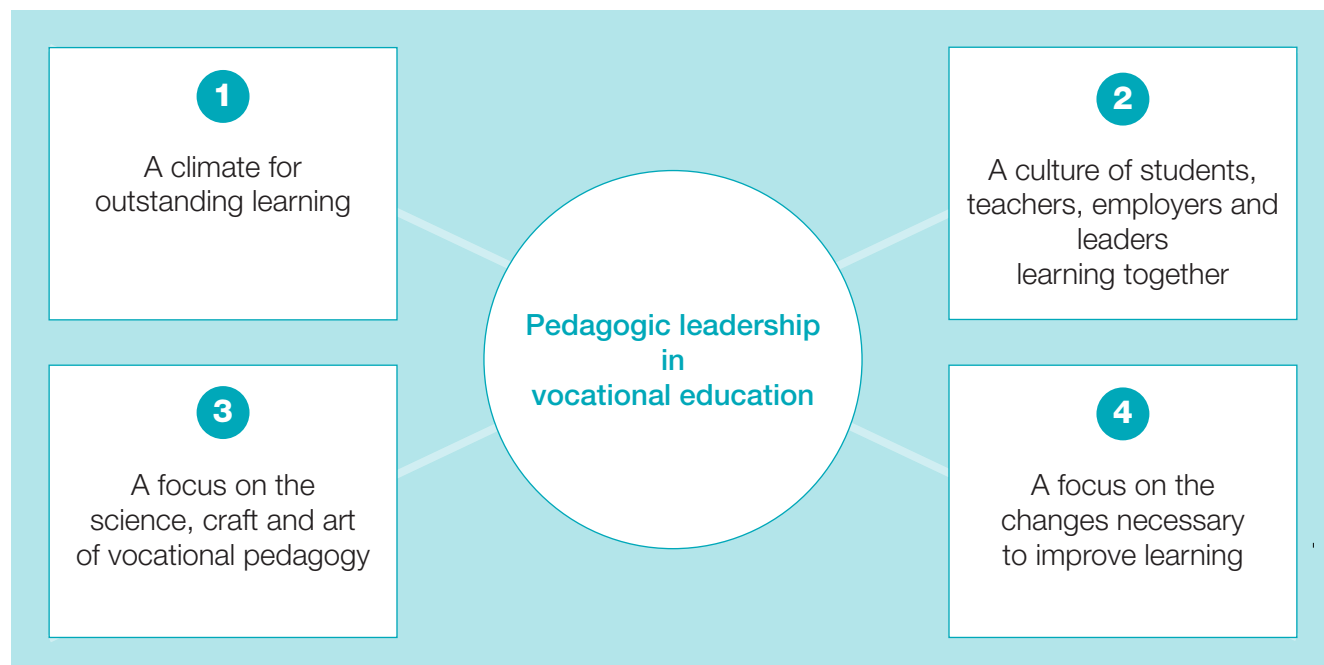


Figure 1 **Pedagogic leadership in vocational education**

While there is much written about teaching and learning it is, we believe, often not at the right level of detail. It tends to be too general ("we value experiential learning") or too specific ("all sessions must start with clear written learning objectives ...") or lacks a connection to the 'real worlds' of vocational education and of the workplace.

As we were undertaking our research, we encountered the term 'pedagogic leadership' and variations on this theme in connection with schools and early years' settings in the USA, South Africa and Australia, and with regard to the education of Maori students in New Zealand⁵ as well as in the UK, by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT).⁶ We have chosen to use the phrase 'pedagogic leadership' here to focus our attention on these aspects of leadership in the learning and skills sector at a time when the tendency is more often to focus on output measures such as examinations, budgets or the more managerial aspects of the job.

In this paper we are trying to understand the kinds of pedagogic leadership that are likely to enable outstanding learning. To help us develop thinking we:

- brought together some college leaders for a day in May 2013 to explore our four questions (using techniques such as Appreciative Inquiry⁷), to surface best practices, and to test the findings of our own research, the key elements of which we describe on the next page, and
- undertook our own investigation of the literature of leadership relating to pedagogy.

5 The following are indicative of this literature: Macneill, N., Cavanagh, R., Silcox, S. (2005) Pedagogic Leadership: Refocusing on Learning and Teaching, 9(2). *IEJLL: International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, North America, 9 January 2005; Macfarlane, K. et al (2011) *Developing and sustaining pedagogical leadership in early childhood education and care professionals – Final Report*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: Australian Learning and Teaching Council; Educational Review Office (2012) *Alternative Education: An Evaluation of the Pedagogical Leadership Initiative*. Wellington, New Zealand.

6 Hargreaves, D. (2006) *Deep Leadership – 1*. London: SSAT.

7 See, for example, Cooperrider, D. and Whitney, D. (2005) *Appreciative Inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

Our seven steps approach to developing vocational pedagogy

Vocational pedagogy is the science, art, and craft of teaching that prepares people for working lives. It is critically shaped by the decisions that are taken by teachers – both high-level strategies, and day-to-day ‘in-the-moment’ ones – and the values that inform all interactions with students. Pedagogy is necessarily concerned with the particular practices and processes by which knowledge is produced, skills are developed and habits of mind are cultivated.

Seven key steps in the development of vocational pedagogy

To develop vocational (or indeed *any* pedagogy) you have to go through a number of logical stages. Here we draw on our report *How to teach vocational education: a theory of vocational pedagogy*⁸ to describe these seven steps so that we can consider what they might mean *from a leadership perspective*.

8

1. Agree the goal
2. Be clear about your desired outcomes
3. Consider the nature of the subject
4. Have a good range of effective vocational learning methods,
5. Know your learners, their prior experiences and needs
6. Be realistic about the vocational setting, and
7. Consider the many dimensions of vocational learning.

This is the pedagogical process through which teachers (and leaders) need to go.

Step 1 – Agree the goal of vocational education

The overarching goal of vocational education is the development of working competence in a chosen vocational area. But because an individual may have several different occupations and also have other roles at home and within the community, vocational education must be able to instil a broad set of values and dispositions as indicated in our outcomes below.

Step 2 – Establish your desired outcomes

We think that great vocational education seeks to achieve six things:

1. Routine expertise – being skilful in a chosen area
2. Resourcefulness – being able to deal with the non-routine and unexpected
3. Functional literacies – verbal, written, numerical, graphical and digital
4. Craftsmanship – an aspiration for excellence and pride in a job well done
5. Businesslike attitudes – dealing with clients, suppliers and customers appropriately
6. Wider skills – developing the dispositions of an effective lifelong learner.

Figure 2 **The six desirable outcomes of vocational education**

The goal of vocational education must, we believe, include the development of *all six* of these outcomes. Each offers the potential for pedagogic leaders to exert their influence on both the climate and culture and the focus on vocational pedagogy and on change we illustrated in Figure 1 on page 7.

On pages 14–18 we explore the leadership challenges and opportunities for these six outcomes in more detail. We suggest that (2), (4) and (6) are particularly challenging and call for real pedagogic leadership.

⁸ Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, op cit.

Step 3 – Consider the nature of the subject and its ‘signature pedagogies’

We suggest that teachers will find it helpful to explore the subtleties of their subject in even greater depth. Specifically it may be helpful for them to consider the ways in which different vocational subjects may develop pedagogies with different ‘signatures’.⁹ A signature pedagogy can be defined by looking at the collection of practices that a specific subject or discipline might adopt. So, a hairdressing salon will organise its teaching and learning in very different ways from, say, a furniture workshop or a teaching restaurant.

Different kinds of vocational education could possibly be distinguished by emphasising the medium through which the work is expressed – see Figure 3. In our research¹⁰ we offer three distinctly different categories of education that focus on working with:

1. physical materials – for example, bricklaying, plumbing, hairdressing, professional make-up
2. people – for example, financial advice, nursing, hospitality, retail, and care industries
3. symbols (words, numbers and images) – for example, accountancy, journalism, software development, graphic design.

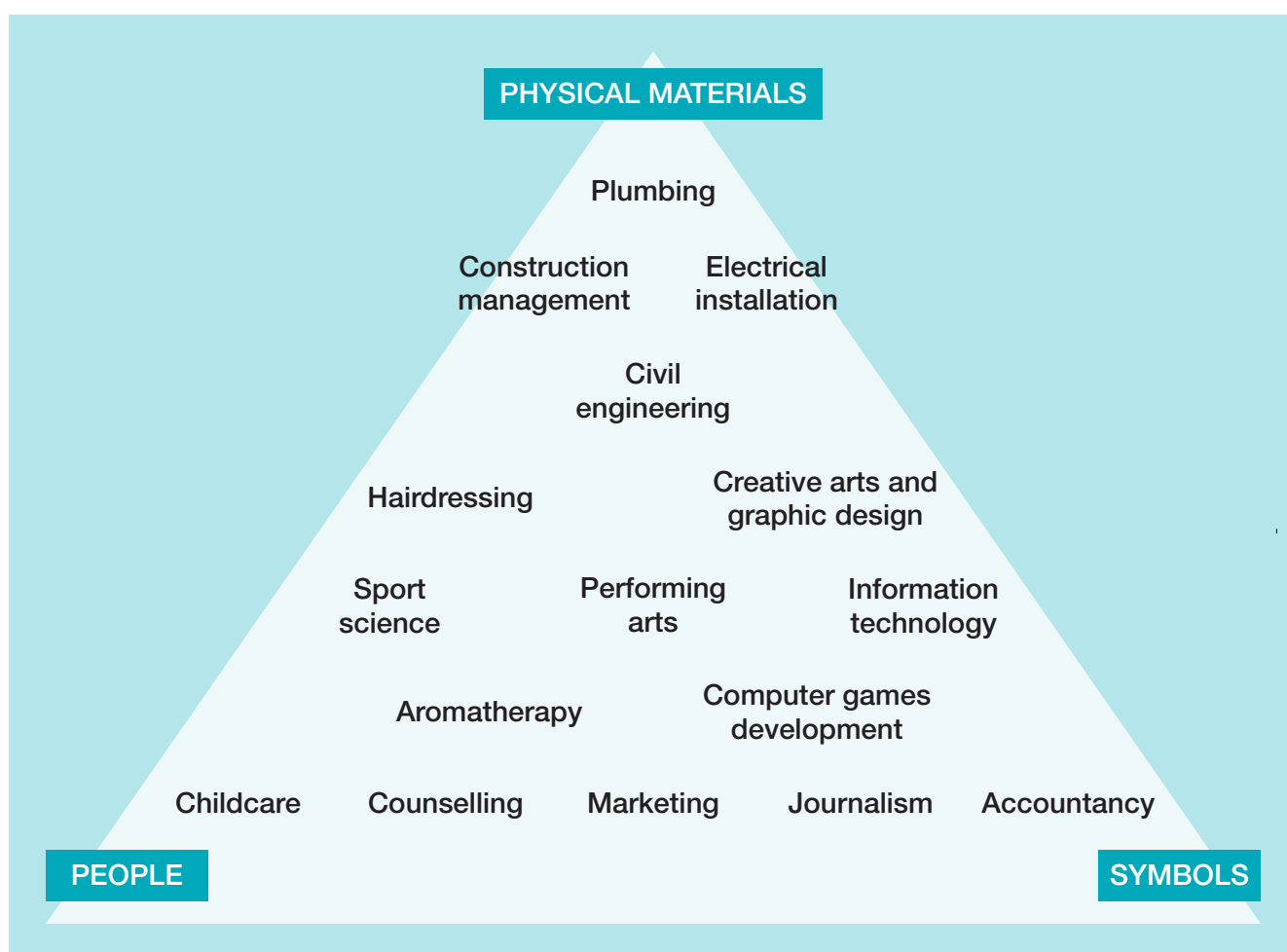


Figure 3 **FE courses mapped against people, materials and symbols**

Of course most FE subjects have elements of all three ‘media’. But our model simply invites teachers to consider the ways in which their ‘classroom’ practice may either be ‘responding’ imaginatively to the opportunities of their ‘material’ or unhelpfully limiting their practices.

9 For the origin of the idea of ‘signature pedagogies’ see Chick, C. and Haynie, A. (eds) (2009) *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: approaches to teaching disciplinary habits of mind*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

10 Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, op cit.

Step 4 – Vocational learning methods

Our research suggests that there is a broad range of things that successful learners do – see Figure 2. They learn:

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| ✓ By watching and imitating | ✓ By drafting and sketching |
| ✓ By practising | ✓ On the fly |
| ✓ Through receiving feedback | ✓ By reflecting |
| ✓ Through conversation | ✓ By being coached |
| ✓ By teaching and helping others | ✓ By competing |
| ✓ By real-world problem-solving | ✓ Through virtual environments |
| ✓ Through enquiry and by thinking critically | ✓ Through simulation and role play |
| ✓ By listening, transcribing and remembering | ✓ Through games. |

Figure 4 **Vocational learning methods that work**¹¹

But a list of learning (and teaching) methods is not yet pedagogy. It simply invites any teacher (or leader) to consider possible methods to use from a really extensive ‘palette’ of choices. Too often teachers stick to the small number of methods with which they feel comfortable. On page 11 of this paper we suggest some broader questions that teachers might find helpful in framing their decision-making process as they select methods. But at this stage we imagine the list will simply be opening a thoughtful teacher’s mind to various questions along the lines of:

If I am trying to teach < a particular course > to < a specific group of students >, which methods might be most likely to deliver the outcomes I want to achieve?

We also remain open to the idea that learners themselves will have many ideas as to how their learning can be managed. As John Hattie puts it:

“It is what learners do that matters ... the aim is to make students active in the learning process ... until [they] reach the stage where they become their own teachers, [i.e.] they can seek out optimal ways to learn new material and ideas, they can seek resources to help them in this learning, and ... they can set appropriate and more challenging goals [for themselves]”¹²

Step 5 – Know your learners

Vocational learners come in all shapes, sizes and ages. Sometimes prior negative experiences have impaired their self-belief and motivation. Sometimes they can be hugely motivated to learn about something practical and self-chosen. But always teachers will want to know their students well in selecting as they consider their chosen pedagogy.

¹¹ Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, op cit.

¹² Hattie, J. (2009) *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Oxon: Routledge.

Step 6 – Be realistic about vocational settings

The environment for vocational learning typically spans workplace and educational institution. The setting includes both the physical space *and* its culture. A lecture theatre affords one kind of interaction where a production line invites another. A climate for learning that values excellence at every level and encourages learners to critique each others' work will be different from one in which the performance regime is so strong that learners seldom share their work in progress.

Step 7 – Consider the many dimensions of vocational teaching and learning

All of the previous six steps need to have been considered before teachers are in a position to design their vocational pedagogy. Depending on the decisions taken by teachers, so the role of the learner changes dramatically, becoming either more proactive and independent or passive and dependent and so impacting on the desired outcomes we listed in Step 2.

To help vocational course designers, we have defined ten dimensions that may be helpful in helping teachers (and leaders) frame their decision-making. Each dimension exists as a continuum. Each line invites a set of questions. So, in terms of attitude to talent, for example, there is an extensive literature demonstrating that talent is indeed expandable, which we explore on page 14 of this piece. So the questions might be: What do I believe? Where would I put myself on this continuum? If I believe that my students really can get smarter, how will this affect the methods I select? How will it influence the way I personally model dealing with difficulty? How will it influence my language? How will it change the way I give feedback? And so on.

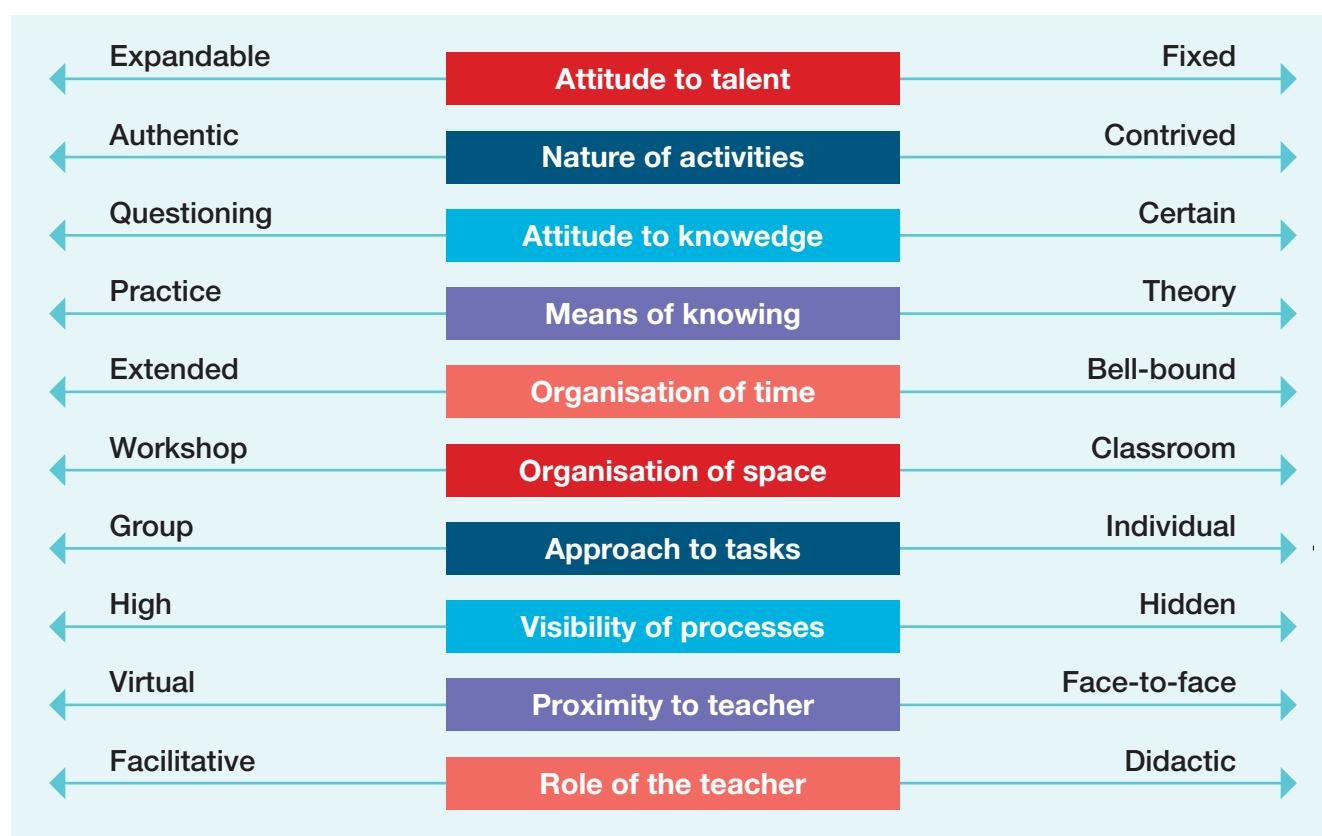


Figure 5 Ten dimensions of pedagogic choice¹³

Thus far we have simply laid the necessary stages to be gone through by any teacher or course designer before decisions about vocational pedagogy can properly be taken.

Now we turn to the leadership implications.

¹³ Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, op cit.

Views on pedagogy and leadership from the learning and skills sector

As part of our consultation day we asked leaders why they thought that pedagogy is not talked of much in FE. Two responses are illustrative:

“There seems to be a general reticence by vocational teachers to engage with what is perceived to be a largely academic dialogue around pedagogy.”

“Do you mean pedagogy needed to deliver motor skills in workshops like salons and garages to do and make? Do you mean to communicate the theories underpinning these activities? Do you mean learning to manage your own behaviour as a student, developing the ability to listen to others with respect, to follow an instruction, to work in groups, to learn to be on time and to manage your own time, to use scissors safely? Vocational education means so many different things.”

In other words pedagogy is both felt to be a concept tainted by academia in the real world of vocational learning *and* considered by vocational leaders to be too unsubtle for their contexts. Nancy Hoffman has recently encapsulated this thinking well:

“[The challenge for vocational teaching and learning professionals is] to build curriculum and assessments that replicate the uncertain, messy, problem-based, people intense, and time limited world of work.”¹⁴



Consultation event at Glaziers' Hall, London

This is the pedagogic leadership challenge and in the rest of our think piece we will offer ways in which it can be addressed. We have already begun to show how the dialogue need not be largely academic but must be informed by the genuinely desired goals and outcomes of vocational education. And our list of methods (Figure 4) and decision-making tool (Figure 5) are serious attempts at dealing with the messy complexity of vocational learning in a way that really prepares students for the messy world of work.

We took vocational leaders through the seven steps process we described on pages 8–11 and asked them tell us what they thought and how they might use some of the approaches and tools as leaders. Their responses were, without exception, positive.

¹⁴ Hoffman, N. (2011) *Schooling in the Workplace*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Press.

Each of our seven steps resonated with them.

1. They agreed with the breadth of our suggested goal.
2. They liked the six suggested outcomes and began to consider how they could rethink the timetable to facilitate all of the outcomes. They raised the issue that literacy and numeracy are too often seen as a bolt-on and viewed too narrowly. They wondered how they could measure the six outcomes and whether it was sensible to attempt this.
3. They agreed that subjects bring with them their signature pedagogies and suggested that Figure 2 could be helpfully used as a means of stimulating conversations in faculties about teaching and learning practices.
4. They particularly liked the broad range of vocational learning methods and wanted to use the list as a template against which to undertake some self-review and as an agenda for staff development.
5. They had many different stories to share about their learners' prior experiences and needs and reminded us that many colleges also deliver 'academic' education to young people of school age and vocational higher education as well as work-based training.
6. A number of leaders were bluntly realistic about the limitations of their own vocational setting in terms of physical space and resources, while recognising that the learning culture was very much in their gift to influence.
7. They very much liked the 'ten dimensions' tool (Figure 5) although they were daunted by the complexity it suggests. As with the list of learning methods, they could see its benefits for college-wide self-reflection, diagnosis and as a means of sharpening their questioning with curriculum managers.

Here is just a flavour of the creative suggestions made by the leaders who attended the day.

For employers

- Give small and micro-businesses more input into the curriculum
- Develop the students of today as the employers of your students tomorrow
- Invest in communicating about what grades and qualifications actually mean
- Create a series of learning companies, like a shopping mall of industries, within your college
- Build a cadre of industry mentors.

For learners and their families

- Actively educate parents to support their children in informed decision-making
- Develop learning companies run by students for students
- Create peer learning communities
- Encourage students to take short teacher training courses to help them understand pedagogic processes better.

For leaders

- Start a college-wide conversation that focuses exclusively on pedagogy
- Use the seven steps approach as a way of establishing current practice and creating an agenda for change.

Pedagogic leadership in practice

Notwithstanding pockets of deep and in some cases very specific thinking,¹⁵ the complexity, importance and value of vocational pedagogy has not been well-enough understood. This is partly because vocational education often takes place in two places, a learning environment such as a college and a work place. But, while this clearly adds complexity and requires teaching expertise across two contexts, it is the range of desired outcomes and variety of vocational subjects that arguably create a far greater leadership challenge than exist, for example, in general education. As the CAVTL report put it:

“We need to strengthen and make more visible the distinctive pedagogies of vocational teaching and learning.”¹⁶

At a more philosophical level Matthew Crawford captures some of these tensions beautifully:

“Given the intrinsic richness of manual work – cognitively, socially, and in its broader psychic appeal – the question becomes why it has suffered such a devaluation as a component of education ... Paradoxically, educators who would steer students toward cognitively rich work might do this best by rehabilitating the manual trades, based on a firmer grasp of what such work is really like.”¹⁷

Our own research, *How to teach vocational education*,¹⁸ provides at least a starting point on which the leadership aspects of vocational pedagogy as they relate to each of the seven steps we outlined on pages 8–11. As we suggested at the start of our piece, the idea of pedagogic leadership is not new but it has not really been applied to FE. We believe that this is the very sector where learning processes are most complex and where pedagogic understanding is most necessary. Simply talking about the need for outstanding teaching and learning is not enough.

In the final part of our piece we return to the four elements of Figure 1 and explore each of the four areas of pedagogic leadership – a climate for outstanding learning; a culture of students, teachers and employers learning together; a focus on the science, craft and art of vocational pedagogy; and a focus on the changes necessary to improve learning.

1. A climate for outstanding learning

The pedagogic leader has a key role in creating the right climate for learning to flourish. Colleges have become big business. In many cases they are not only delivering further education in all its many manifestations, but also providing significant amounts of higher education. Unsurprisingly this takes considerable managerial skill to pull off. Equally unsurprisingly the tendency is to talk of latest funding initiatives rather than the nuances of teaching apprentice furniture-makers. But it is essential that the conversations that staff and students remember are about learning.

Pedagogic leaders create a climate in which everyone feels that they can succeed. It is no accident that there has been a number of popular books about how traditional views of talent are overrated. Matthew Syed's *Bounce*¹⁹ and Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*²⁰ are just two examples. In different ways these popular books are shifting the discourse about intelligence away from nature towards nurture. The way that pedagogic leaders talk about learners and teachers needs to reflect this shift. Specifically they need to promote and model what Carol Dweck calls a 'growth mindset'²¹ or 'can do' attitude.

15 Deep as in the work, for example, of Nancy Hoffman in the US in Hoffman, op cit. Detailed, for example, as in Nicholas Farrar and Gill Trorey in Farrar, N. & Trorey, G. (2008) Maxims, Tacit Knowledge and Learning: Developing expertise in dry stone walling. *Journal of Vocational Education*, 60(1): 35–68.

16 McLoughlin, op cit.

17 Crawford, M. (2009) *Shopcraft as soulcraft*. New York: Penguin Books.

18 Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, op cit.

19 Syed, M. (2011) *Bounce: the myth of talent and power of practice*. London: Fourth Estate.

20 Gladwell, M. (2009) *Outliers: the story of success*. London: Penguin Books.

21 Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York: Random House.

Pedagogic leaders are constantly talking about their own learning adventures, the mistakes they have made and what they have learned from them. They are endlessly curious, asking questions the answers to which they genuinely want to find out. They talk about practising, about effort and about hard work. They tend to come across as personally resilient and their speech is peppered with example of people whom they admire who have shown ‘grit’ in getting to whatever they have achieved. They tend to use ‘we’ more often than ‘I’ and are generous in their acknowledgement of the work of others. Their default position is to want to collaborate with others rather than ‘going it alone’. In short they believe, as we have argued elsewhere, that intelligence can be learned.²²

Pedagogic leaders set the cultural tone by the way they model what they believe in and according to what the way in which they encourage others to do likewise. While such leaders want teachers and students to perform well (who would desire otherwise?) they know that the way to achieve this is *not* to dwell on the performance, but instead to focus on learners and learning.²³

Our ten dimensions tool on page 11 also offers clues as to the kind of culture that might encourage great vocational learning. So, leaders will actively seek to create the kinds of learning-oriented cultures suggested by each of our ten dimensions as the examples below show:

1. Attitude to talent – feedback and praise that is specific as to effort expended and so encouraging a growth mindset in all students
2. Nature of activities – more authentic, work-based experiences and fewer occasions when excuses such as “you need to know this for the test even though it won’t happen in a real job” are deployed
3. Attitude to knowledge – more and better questioning and less giving of ‘easy’ answers to complex workplace issues
4. Means of knowing – a judicious blend of practice and theory, with the default setting being that learning through real-world experience/enquiry/trial and error is the expected approach
5. Organisation of time – extended opportunities to spend days on tasks (as you do at work) rather than relying on the convenience of an fragmented timetable
6. Organisation of space – a studio mentality with displays of work in progress, prototypes, workplace tools designed to encourage a belief that the college is a ‘workshop’ not a ‘classroom’
7. Approach to tasks – a real valuing of collective problem-solving rather than a tendency to assume that, because collaboration is often not assessed, it is less important
8. Visibility of processes – a culture of explanation in which learning processes are made visible in annotated displays and in which leaders and teachers constantly talk about the how of learning
9. Proximity to teacher – technology is actively welcomed and where the question is not whether to use technology but when to, and where face-to-face time with teachers is used judiciously
10. Role of the teacher – a place where everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner, where the goal of teaching is to empower students to take more responsibility for their learning.²⁴

22 Lucas, B. and Claxton, G. (2010) *New kinds of smart: how the science of learnable intelligence is changing education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

23 The enhancement of school performance in learning-oriented classrooms has been well-documented, in, for example, Watkins, C. (2010) *Learning, Performance and Improvement*. *INSI Research Matters No. 34*. London: IoE.

24 Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, op cit.

A major difference between a workplace and a college is that the former has to delight its consumers by producing excellent products and services without ever necessarily explaining how this is done, while the latter needs absolutely to focus on making the processes of learning visible in the longer-term hope that this will help to produce learners and workers who really understand how to get better at what they are working at or learning.

The conversation of pedagogic leaders focuses on the learning process, on how things are being taught and learned. Everything about learning, as John Hattie puts it, needs to be visible,²⁵ out in the open and a proper subject of conversation. In their office you are likely to find annotated prototypes as you are neaten up final products. In the corridors, as well as images of the kind of people who typify the attributes described in the last paragraph, you will find countless displays of both high quality final pieces and thoughtfully critiqued works in progress.

2. A culture of students, teachers and employers learning together

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For the pedagogic leader teaching and learning are explicitly two sides of the same coin. While the professional responsibility for teaching sits firmly with staff, there is a recognition that achievement and attainment increases when students take more responsibility for their own learning (including coaching and teaching their peers) and when teachers are actively learning and enquiring into how they can select the best possible methods for their students. The roles of teacher and student are changing and, as John Hattie has shown compellingly,²⁶ this is a force for improvement and not an abnegation of responsibility.

By the creation of our Expansive Education Network²⁷ we have shown how, in practice, institutions can become professional learning communities and how teachers can undertake professional enquiry to ensure that they are really noticing the impact of their teaching on students. It is this kind of collaborative questioning that pedagogic leaders need to encourage.

It is much more challenging to get employers involved as learners and teachers for the very obvious reason that their primary focus is to run a business. Typically educationalists consult employers when they are about to devise a new course and employers have been known to tell colleges when they think that the students they are producing are not 'work-ready'. Pedagogic leaders tend to be more creative in the ways in which they engage employers in course design, in acting as mentors and coaches and in taking part. (See also page 13 for other suggestions.)

Pedagogic leaders model their own love of learning and take pleasure in talking about what they are seeing, reading and learning about learning. Their role is to create a culture of collaborative enquiry and questioning within the institution focused around pedagogy.

3. A focus on the science, craft and art of vocational pedagogy

That a deep pedagogic understanding is at the core of leadership in vocational education has been the thrust of this paper. Our most important message is that you can create a vocational pedagogy *only by going through the kind of seven steps process we have outlined on pages 8–11*. This process cannot be short-circuited.

Pedagogic leaders make sure that the majority of their interactions with staff and students are learning-focused. How did you do that? How could you make that better? Who else does this really well? Where else could you go to find out more? What are the interesting questions here? What other method could you have used? Could you teach someone else how to do this?

In a busy institution it is hard but not impossible to ensure that these kinds of questions triumph over the inevitable (and important) concerns with managerial organisation that call for the attention of senior leaders.

²⁵ Hattie, op cit.

²⁶ This argument is the central theme of Hattie, op cit.

²⁷ See www.expansiveeducation.net

4. A focus on the changes necessary to improve learning

We have argued that there are six outcomes of vocational education that are desirable and that, unless all of these are in place, vocational education can easily become too narrow and not the genuinely interesting and worthwhile alternative pathway to general education that we believe it to be. Each of our six outcomes requires a certain kind of leadership focus.²⁸

Routine expertise is important and the assessment systems of many vocational courses drive focuses on the development of skills. Pedagogic leaders will want to ensure that staff are deploying the full range of methods we list in Figure 4 on page 10.

To encourage *resourcefulness* leaders need first of all to define the concept so that it is widely understood. Then it needs to be celebrated whenever it is seen in staff and students and actively promoted it across the institution. In terms of pedagogy they will want to be sure that staff are confident in using problem-solving, problem-based and enquiry-led methods of teaching from our list in Figure 4 on page 10.

To develop *functional literacies*, leaders will need to go beyond merely insisting on improvements in the teaching of literacy and numeracy to a real recognition of the breath of this concept (including graphical and digital literacies). They will need to encourage great imagination in the teaching of verbal, written and numerical literacies to those learners who have failed thus far to acquire the necessary levels of competence and address head on the issue as to whether they are best taught by specialists, embedded within a course by a subject teacher or a combination of the two.

To develop *craftsmanship* in all learners, leaders have to accept nothing less than the best from themselves from their staff and from students. They need to show how anyone who has pride in what they do has a model in their head of what they want to create or make and not give up until they have achieved it. The pedagogic leaders' vocabulary of striving for excellence will include words and phrases such as: drafting, polishing up, refining, shaping, moulding, re-working, re-drafting, critiquing, practising, and so forth.

To inculcate *businesslike attitudes*, pedagogic leaders will necessarily have to focus on the environment in which teaching and learning takes place to ensure that it closely replicates the real world of work. They will want to encourage regular exchanges between employers, skilled employees, teachers and learners. By modelling their own ceaseless attention on the needs of students as customers, they will demonstrate how this principle is at the heart of business life, whether for profit or not.

And finally, an emphasis on the acquisition of *wider skills* for life and learning will permeate the institution. The pedagogic leader will want to orchestrate discussion as to what they are – determination, creative problem-solving, reflectiveness, empathy, team-working etc – and then ensure that they are embedded in all teaching and learning and not tacked on as an extra.

Promoting resourcefulness, developing an ethic of excellence in which craftsmanship is the norm and emphasising the wider skills necessary for a lifetime of learning are, arguably, the elements of vocational education that can get squeezed out under the pressure of Ofsted, assessment, government policy and financial fees.

Of course any educational institution has a moral duty to prepare all of its students to achieve great results in whatever course they are studying. But so, too, it must ensure that they leave equipped to learn things when they do not have the support of the college, to be able to thrive in situations that are novel and unexpected.

Our six desired outcomes are unlikely to be in place in all colleges, just as teachers are unlikely to be completely confident and competent in all learning methods. In some cases an argument will have to be advanced by the leaders of a college to persuade colleagues that vocational education is indeed as broad as we are suggesting.

²⁸ Lucas, Spencer and Claxton, op cit.

One thing is certain. Any leader whose focus is on trying to improve learning will need to change the status quo in many aspects of institutional life.

In doing this it will be important to disentangle three factors that need to be in place and that can all too easily become muddled together. The three factors needed to overcome resistance to change have helpfully been reduced to a formula by David Gleicher:²⁹

$$D \times V \times F > R$$

D = Dissatisfaction with how things are

V = Vision of what is possible

F = First, concrete steps that can be taken towards the vision

R = Resistance to change

Pedagogic leaders will need to state clearly and non-judgmentally their *dissatisfaction* with the current situation in terms of teaching, learning and pedagogy.

They will need to articulate a *vision* of the broad outcomes that the college's vocational courses are seeking to deliver. We have offered six suggestions for what these might be.

And they will need to offer *first concrete steps* towards the realisation of their vision. The first of these steps will involve taking the college on a journey through our seven step process.

Of course, how leaders express their dissatisfaction, the process by which the vision is created and the realism with which practical first steps are agreed will define the style of the leader. In our experience, just as learning is increasingly teaching is increasingly becoming facilitative, so to pedagogic leaders are likely to want to be facilitative and collaborative in their approaches.

²⁹ The development of Gleicher's formula is described well in Dannemiller, K. D., and Jacobs, R. W. (1992). Changing the way organizations change: A revolution of common sense. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 28(4), 480–498.

An agenda for leading vocational pedagogy

In his celebrated book, *Good to Great*,³⁰ Jim Collins introduces a helpful concept – the hedgehog leader – which he describes here in *Fast Company* magazine:

“Picture two animals: a fox and a hedgehog. Which are you? An ancient Greek parable distinguishes between foxes, which know many small things, and hedgehogs, which know one big thing. All good-to-great leaders, it turns out, are hedgehogs. They know how to simplify a complex world into a single, organizing idea—the kind of basic principle that unifies, organizes, and guides all decisions.”³¹

Pedagogic leaders need to be hedgehogs. And the big thing they know is vocational pedagogy and the processes by which it can best be developed.

In these last two pages we offer a four-stage process that leaders in FE might like to explore, shape, adapt and develop for their own contexts. It is informed by Gleicher’s thinking, by our notion of pedagogic leadership in vocational contexts and by the seven steps process at the heart of this paper.

1. Take stock

Use each of the five approaches described in the five figures in this paper as the basis of some college-wide self-reflection to create a college-wide conversation about the degree to which vocational pedagogy is driving and unifying your institution. Engage learners and employers in the process as much as possible.

Use an Appreciative Inquiry approach inviting colleagues to tell their colleagues:

- a) what they are already doing well
- b) what they would like to do in their wildest dreams if time and money were no object.

Then you are well-placed collectively to draw attention to the gap between your aspirations and the reality of your current situation and so articulate your dissatisfaction with the status quo.



2. Articulate your own vision

Using the same five approaches, generate a strategic vision for your institution and share it widely.

Decide on some simple success measures for each aspect.



30 Collins, J. (2001b) *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't*. New York: HarperBusiness.

31 Collins, J. (2001a) Good to great, *Fast Company*.

3. Lay out the next steps

Create a road map with your concrete plans along the way clearly laid out. Clearly indicate short-term goals but at the same time recognise it will take a longer time and that it is never-ending.

You might like to identify and/or appoint pedagogic leaders throughout your organisation who will act as champions for these changes.



4. Celebrate, reflect and evaluate

Throughout the process it will be important to share successes and create a culture of continuous improvement. You will need to decide on the success measures you need and on the kinds of data you wish to collect and use.

You might like to consider switching much of your professional development activity towards encouraging rigorous professional enquiry using the techniques of action research.

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About us

157 Group

The 157 Group is a collective grouping of 30 of the UK's largest FE colleges, which exists to serve its members and the interests of the sector more widely on three levels:

- **thought leadership** – setting out visionary and sometimes radical agendas for how things might be done differently in the future
- **practice improvement** – enabling our members to work together to derive experience and knowledge, and to spread good practice for the benefit of all learners and employers
- **policy influence** – using the experience of our members to directly inform the views of government and policy makers, government bodies and agencies, academics and other influencers of opinion.

We use **praxis-based evidence**, through a combination of research, peer support, practitioner-based activity and public communications, and our members act as the **laboratory for testing and developing** new approaches. We work **in partnership** with other colleges, employer umbrella organisations, national and regional bodies involved in education, government and its agencies.

The Centre for Real-World Learning (CRL) at the University of Winchester

CRL is an innovative research centre working closely with practitioners in education and in a range of vocational contexts. It is especially interested in new thinking and innovative practices in two areas:

- the science of learnable intelligence and the implementation of expansive approaches to education
- the field of embodied cognition and its implications for practical learning and for vocational education.

This think piece draws extensively on its acclaimed research for City & Guilds, *How to teach vocational education: a theory of vocational pedagogy*. Visit www.winchester.ac.uk and www.expansiveeducation.net.

City & Guilds



The City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development is a not-for-profit research and development body for vocational education and training. It works to influence and improve skills policy and practice worldwide through an evidence-based approach. It commissioned the Centre for Real-World Learning at the University of Winchester to establish the need for a vocational pedagogy, and examine what it might look like and how it might work.

The report seeks to lay the foundation for the development of a vocational pedagogy. It offers a theoretical underpinning for vocational teaching and learning, and proposes a model to support teachers in vocational education. The report is the result of extensive research, including a literature review, a focus group with expert practitioners working in the field of vocational education and semi-structured interviews with six key thinkers in the fields of vocational education and vocational pedagogy. The report covers England, but the literature reviewed is international in scope.

For further information about the City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development and to download a copy of the report, visit www.skillsdevelopment.org.

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Contact the 157 Group

The 157 Group Limited
P O Box 58147
London
SW8 9AF

www.157group.co.uk
info@157group.co.uk

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